

Montana HB 445

3-17-09

Chairman Steinbeisser, members of the committee,

My name is Al Skogen, I am here today to encourage a no vote on HB 445. I farm in eastern North Dakota and I appreciate the opportunity as a non Montanan to address you on this important issue.

Historically my county was always one of the top three counties in the US for the production of spring wheat and Malting barley, today we are one of the top soybean producing counties in the us and corn has become the Cinderella crop of choice for many the last few years.

There are several reasons for this transition, but on my farm, and many others, it would not have happened without access to the biotech traits currently available in these crops.

One of the most confusing things for me about this bill, is that I do not know of a single neighbor of mine who grows biotech crops, and is honest about it, and acquires his seed properly, and pays his share to see that research continues and access to new technologies is protected, who would have any objection to allowing access to his fields.

In fact, a common practice in our area is for farmers to allow seed dealers to post our fields with signs identifying the seed variety, biotech traits, and company who markets the seed, basically inviting folks to take a look.

The other thing is that there is a real network of seed dealers, agronomists, and honest neighbors out there that, in combination, develop a great deal of knowledge every year about almost every field in their neighborhoods. Its true, by the end of the season there is hardly a field that doesn't have a story. These folks pretty much know who is following the rules and who is of questionable character when it comes to things like patented seed theft.

I have been acutely involved in promotion of biotechnology in crops for years, and have never, not once, been aware of a case where a trait company has randomly or without enormous cause and evidence, wrongly pursued a patent infringement case.

When you think about it, hundreds of thousands of honest farmers have planted biotech crops in the US each year for 12 years, and yet, the anti technology crowd continually holds up the same small handful of farmers as examples of how nasty giant corporations intentionally destroy farmers credibility, reputation, family and farming operations, apparently, just for fun. I think not, in fact, I am quite positive that does not happen.

There is no common sense or business practices that would encourage such an act. People just do not sue their customers for no reason. The truth is, these folks illegally planted patented technology and got caught, and have been on a campaign to reverse the blame ever since.

There has been a lot of confusion in the Wheat industry in the past about acceptance of biotechnology, caused primarily by anti technology groups who have distorted the facts about the safety, segregation and marketability of this technology. Today, after thorough research and examination and thoughtfulness, the wheat industry recognizes the opportunity and necessity to embrace this technology and are united in this effort. This bill could seriously effect the timing of the first trait introduction in wheat. Montana is wheat, and when you look at the major grower, and other farm organizations here today opposing this bill, far and away, representing the vast majority of mainstream producers of this state, there should be little doubt about the destiny of this bill.

If there was a good consensus that such a law needs to be enacted in Montana, then I would expect these groups, with proper consult with their members, researchers, seed dealers, trait developers, ag department officials, legal officials, and concerned farmers, would develop language for future consideration.

I am sure others here today will talk about the risks and details of this bill and how the related dangers of this bill really extend beyond biotechnology. So, assuming that, I thank you for your time and ask you to vote no on HB445.

Green peace, friends of the earth, centre for food safety, resource councils, Organic producer groups, and so called environmental groups

This technology holds more potential to increase food production for a growing global population, enhance soil, water, and the environment, and create economic opportunity than any other agricultural technology in modern history.